



**THE ART  
OF  
CREATIVE**

How to champion creativity,  
change culture and save your soul

**REBELLION**

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COUCH

**THE ART OF CREATIVE REBELLION**

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“Orthodoxy means  
not thinking—not  
needing to think.  
Orthodoxy is  
unconsciousness.”

**GEORGE ORWELL, 1984**

**Rebel!**  
**Rebel!**



**The world  
needs  
creative  
thinkers  
more than  
ever.**

Not questioning the status quo or authority has led us to the precipice of authoritarianism and Orwellian mindlessness.

The more creative people we have in the world, the better.

More designers, more artists, more architects, more writers, more actors, more scientists.

The practice of actively thinking is missing from our lives as our fragile attention is bombarded and fragmented by social media and Fox News, CNN and MSNBC. Creative people avoid easy-peasy solutions handed to us via mass media. We think for ourselves.

I'm using the umbrella of *design*, but please consider it shorthand for whatever creative process you choose to engage with. It's a metaphor for the larger theme of empowering yourself to open up the valves of creative potential that we are all born with. Somewhere along the line, we shut that valve down. Society and schools tell us to become practical (either overtly or implicitly), and then life gets complicated—we have to pay bills, support a family, go to a job we hate—and then that burning flame of the real self, our original face as Zen Buddhism calls it, is slowly but surely diminished. But I don't believe it's ever put out. We all have it. This book is about how to reignite the burner and start cooking again—and how to keep cooking when burnout sets in.

Even though I've been fortunate enough to have the titles *creative*, *design* or *art* in most of my day jobs (à la *Creative Director* or *Head of Design*), I've spent most of my life actively not doing the things I knew I wanted to do, what I was meant to make: art, design (on my terms) and literature. I guess the utility (or lack of therein) and marginal social acceptability of my interests nagged at me; but if I really dig down inside, it was more a lack of

confidence in my abilities that stopped me. Classic case of knowing way too much art and design history and having read a ton of brilliant writers from Ernest Hemingway to Haruki Murakami to Zadie Smith—it was paralyzing. Knowing too much didn't allow me to be my authentic self in all of its potentially mundane glory. My inner critic stopped me before I even got through a sketch or a chapter in a book.

## **What I know now is,**

**Your first attempts will most likely be awful (at least in your eyes) but plowing through is essential—it's quantity that leads to quality.**

**Do a ton of work and the individual thing you make won't be as precious.**

**You can *kill your darlings* more easily as there will be more darlings right in line behind them.**

## ( HOW TO )

**I find that meditation works well to activate the contemplative state.** Personally, I use Headspace, but any kind of silent sitting, preferably in the early morning, can help settle the mind. I find that early morning journaling, where I just write out everything that concerns me and what I'm going to do about it, is immensely helpful as it gets subconscious concerns out into the light and allows me to look at them directly. This act alone often disarms much of the anxiety stored in our minds and subsequently our bodies as stress.

Before I sit outside in the backyard to write or stand in front of a blank canvas to paint, I take a moment to simply sit and count my breaths. I visualize light pouring forth from the area between my eyebrows and a line from there sinking down into



my heart (hey, it works for me). What this does is strip away the detritus of the day, the distracting weight of emotions or worries that swirl with mindless, lunatic insistence to the periphery of my consciousness, and the armor falls off, allowing the actual *me* to appear. This “me” is without self-doubt or petty super-ego; perhaps more akin to the id. Whatever it is, it flows and allows for things to manifest without critique—it is the *maker* part of oneself. After a few hours of maintaining this state, something unmitigated can come forth. And as this elevated state of natural focus naturally winds down, it means getting ready for the day job after writing for a couple hours in the morning light of the garden or brushing my hands clean of paint at midnight and coming back to reality before going to bed.

I think there is a sacred space you enter when you are actively engaged in this manner—time disappears and when you stop, there is something there that wasn't there before. The sacred space can be the yoga studio, the gym, the temple, the church, the dojo, the studio, the library or the mountain-side. But it's only as sacred as the state with which you enter it. Hence the breathing and visualization techniques. And it's hard to maintain that state indefinitely and, in my experience, better to rotate between the profound and the profane: the day job can be a healthy counterbalance to the ethereal realms of creative flow and can, in fact, inform them. Shifting cognitive states is hard at times but it's a skill worth developing so you can pull the best from both worlds.



**Creative  
thinking requires  
just one thing:  
contemplation.**

**This means getting beyond the distractions** of social media; getting beyond the need to fill up your empty time, between work and taking care of family and friends, with TV or drinking or eating out too many times in one week. **Contemplation requires a form of relaxed focus. And focus is in short supply nowadays** with so much vying for our attention.

I'm concerned with rebellion. Not destructive rebellion but *creative rebellion*. The creative act is initially viewed as disruptive and is often suppressed, even by companies that seek to be *innovative*—a word that has lost almost all its meaning through repetition. As a creative person you may find yourself simultaneously admired and repressed; considered integral to the company or project you are working on and then unceremoniously discarded after you deliver the goods; celebrated and then isolated. This is the path of all creative individuals or those who aspire to the creative path. It's tough; but in my estimation, there is no other way to live.

Something interesting has happened to me over time, as I moved into what is commonly considered middle age: I have become more rebellious, more productive, more open to ideas that I would have considered hogwash as a young man. I am more intuitive. As a child, I took in the world with a poetic lens that began to fade over time. I was attuned to the rhythm of the world in a way that came naturally—I didn't have to force that sense of oneness. Perhaps I am glorifying the past through the backward glance of nostalgia, but it remains real to me.

When I was around eight years old, I recall riding my red and white Schwinn bicycle—the kind with rickety mudguards that clattered as I peddled along cracked sidewalks that had been pushed upwards by massive oak roots into Evel Kneivel cement

ramps, slabs of gray glaciers, just for me, don't you know. The late afternoon light of autumn cast deep shadows across empty brown lawns and the Texas air carried a chill that stung, blurring my eyes and making my nose run. Like all children that age, I wiped it away with the back of my right sleeve, the dark blue sweater's well-worn nap soft against my raw nose.

I don't know why I stopped at the old house. And I don't know how I ended up in the backyard. I was a painfully shy child, so it was completely against my nature to walk my bike up the driveway, push open the faux-wrought-iron gates, the dirty white paint chipping away from lichen-like rust. I found myself in a garden, standing on a path that led to a cottage, a brick guest house. As I recall this, I don't know if I've stepped into the motel art of a Thomas Kinkade painting or the beginning of a Stephen King novel; but I remember being inside the cottage, being fed cookies and hot chocolate by an older woman, who had one eye that trailed to the left when she blinked, and her quiet, I assume, daughter, who smiled and brought in the treats. The older woman, with her gray hair up in a bun, asked me simple questions (my name, my age, my favorite comic book heroes). The room was warm from a small wood-burning fireplace, and eventually I fell asleep. When I awoke, they were gone, the room empty but the fire still going. I got up, let myself out, walked through the garden to the gate, got on my bike and rode out

into the brisk air and darkness of the neighborhood. When I got home, my parents didn't seem to notice that I had been absent as they talked in the kitchen and took care of my little sister, who would have been around two at the time, so I went to my room.

The next day, after school, I rode around again, trying to find the house. The sunlight was different, monochrome and dull, and the maple leaves were wet and flat against the sidewalk. I rode and rode, looping through the streets, crisscrossing them with no luck. I couldn't find the house. I went home disheartened, walked past the kitchen with its clanking of utensils and hissing discussions about bills that needed to be paid. I went into my room (the converted front porch) and lay back on the thin carpet that covered the hard cement floor. Cold, hard reality set back in.

Whether this recollection is real or not, it activates a sense of calmness, a glimpse of what is referred to in Zen Buddhism as *kenshō*: seeing, albeit fleetingly, one's own Buddha nature or *original face*—the non-duality that addresses the separation between oneself and everything else in the world. This mindset of attaining one's original face is what I'm referring to as *creative rebellion*; a practice that requires active mindfulness and the stripping down of the inherited stories that we gather as we move through life: our religion, our nationality, our morality, our ideas of success and failure. Once we are laid bare we can consciously choose what stories we want to propagate, what narratives we want to associate with ourselves.



**The creative rebel  
is one who awakens  
from the soul-  
numbing norms of  
societal and corporate  
expectations and  
becomes, ultimately,  
their true self.**